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ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a descriptive study of collaborative activities undertaken by postsecondary institutions in Cleveland (Ohio) with Cleveland Public Schools. The nature of collaborative activities is described and recommendations for multi-interinstitutional cooperation leading to a common educational agenda are discussed. An analysis of the survey revealed several major trends that seem to characterize school-college partnerships in greater Cleveland. These trends indicate that: (1) the majority of student development, academic precollegiate, and career programs were concentrated at the upper-secondary level; (2) many of the program opportunities targeted the academically accomplished, college-bound student; (3) large populations of at-risk students were underserved or entirely neglected by school-college partnerships; and (4) virtually no program coordination between elementary, junior, and senior high schools was identified. The following recommendations are offered as possible strategies for action: (1) future collaborative programming should be expanded to reach a broader segment of the student population; (2) strategies should be developed that will achieve a better balance of program representation across the curriculum and across grade levels; and (3) schools and colleges should work together to develop the necessary linkages between elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary institutions. One figure is included, along with a list of 12 references. (JS)

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COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES AND THE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A COLLABORATION DILEMMA!

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COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES AND THE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A COLLABORATION DILEMMA!

America's urban centers are disproportionately composed of racial and ethnic minorities who make up a large segment of the lower socioeconomic strata. Education is the primary means by which this large segment of society can attain socioeconomic mobility. Yet, many students in urban schools fail to attain even a basic level of educational achievement and many more never negotiate the system to graduation. Drop-out rates are as high as 50% in some cities. The prospect of access to higher education is bleak when the majority of inner-city students lack the basic academic preparation necessary to succeed in post-secondary education. According to the recent Carnegie Report (1988) An Imperiled Generation, aggressive action is needed which will encourage two- and four-year institutions in urban areas to develop special relationships with schools to enrich teachers and students, improve academic preparation, recruit minority students, train more minority teachers, and help schools in the design of flexible school models. The purpose of this article is to report the findings of an analysis of collaborative activities undertaken by postsecondary institutions in a large urban school district. The nature of collaborative activities is described and recommendations for multi-interinstitutional

cooperation leading to a common educational agenda are discussed.

School-college partnerships are not new phenomena to public education. However, since A Nation at Risk (1983) school-college partnerships have been increasingly identified as critical linkages necessary for large scale school improvement agendas (Boyer, 1983; Maeroff, 1983). Since the early 1980s school-college collaboration has exploded into the national spotlight with many higher education institutions developing and implementing partnerships with public schools. The National Directory of School-College Partnerships (1987) has catalogued hundreds of these programs and featured many exemplary models.

The large urban center is often served by multiple higher education institutions ranging in size from small, private institutions to large state universities. This diversity can provide opportunities for varied programming and unique collaborative arrangements between urban schools and local colleges and universities. On the other hand, it can also create problems for developing effective linkages between and among these varied institutions of higher learning and the public schools. Lacking common educational agendas, these diverse institutions often proceed in a piecemeal fashion, minimizing their ultimate effectiveness in serving the large urban school district. As one urban school system superintendent said, "I'm so damn busy meeting with Deans and

College Professors wanting 'to help' I can't get anything done.

THE URBAN SETTING

The City of Cleveland, like many large urban centers, is confronted with the harsh realities of the urban context. Partly as the result of court ordered desegregation, the Cleveland Public School enrollment has dropped from 148,845 ADM to a current enrollment of 72,263 in just 15 years. The composition of the student body consists of a 75% minority enrollment. According to Cleveland school Superintendent Alfred Tutela, 63% of these students receive ADC, 75% are living below the poverty level, 50% live in substandard housing and 75% live in single-parent households. Moreover, the district's poverty rate is 68.23%. As a result of this background, aspirations and hopes for secondary or post-secondary education are not usually generated by students' parents. The majority of students who do attend public and private four-year colleges do not graduate in four or five years. For example, follow-up data on the Cleveland Public School graduating class of 1984 shows that 109 students (or 4% of a sample of 2,482 students) were currently enrolled during 1987-88 in a four-year college program and only one student had graduated (District Periodic Status Report Summary/Sample Graduates, 9/1/88). Thus, the cycle of poverty continues.

Greater Cleveland area higher education institutions range from small select art and music institutes, liberal arts colleges, community colleges to large comprehensive state universities. In an appeal to northeastern Ohio colleges and universities, Superintendent Tutela urged higher education institutions to respond in a coordinated fashion to three common educational agendas: 1) to help increase the number of high school graduates, 2) to improve the quality of the diploma they receive, and 3) to ensure equality of opportunity for access to post-secondary education for all students regardless of race or socioeconomic status.

CLEVELAND COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The Cleveland Commission on Higher Education (CCOHE) is an organization, founded in 1951, of ten postsecondary education institutions based in Cuyahoga County. A primary goal of the Commission is to coordinate interinstitutional activities and to facilitate communications. Various colleges and universities (CCOHE members and nonmembers) had established isolated programs with the Cleveland City Schools before 1986. Early in that year, however, a movement was started to extend this involvement. At a meeting held in March of 1986, Superintendent Tutela suggested that the Cleveland Commission on Higher Education act as the convener of a group of institutions already participating in this effort in addition to its own membership.

A Steering Committee was formed to guide this endeavor. Colleges (including CCOHE and non-CCOHE members) as well as Cleveland City School representatives were included. In addition to individual efforts Precollegiate Symposia have been organized to enhance and coordinate school-college collaborative efforts. These are the "public" features of this program. Much work has also been done on a smaller scale in committee meetings, one-on-one discussions, with college administrators, and through college involvement with individual schools or Cleveland City School administrative units known as clusters.

ISOLATION OF PROGRAMMING

Hodgkinson (1985) has characterized the educational enterprise from preschools through secondary, undergraduate and graduate institutions as operating as a set of discrete institutions working in isolation from each other. Those involved within the various educational levels have "virtually no connection with all the others and little awareness of educational activity provided by the total" (Hodgkinson, 1985; p. 1). This situation appears to be true not only between educational levels but within the same level as well. That is, higher education institutions often do not know what other higher education institutions are doing. This can result in competition between programs, competition for the best and brightest students, duplication of programs, turf conflicts,

and lack of awareness of the needs of the entire district. Certainly this was the case in Cleveland.

In 1986 a CCOHE steering committee was formed to develop a framework for identifying and classifying existing partnerships as well as providing a mechanism for the ongoing development coordination and planning of future collaborative projects. Guided by these objectives, several natural questions arose. What collaborative programs are currently taking place? What is the impact of these programs on teachers and students? What are the areas of program concentration and need? How can colleges and universities identify and build upon current successes? How can varied and diverse educational institutions be organized and mobilized to maximize the effectiveness of urban school-college partnerships? To respond to these questions an analysis was conducted of existing partnerships with the Cleveland Public Schools.

THE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

A naturalistic evaluation design (Guba, 1978) was employed to address the aforementioned questions. This study was sponsored by the Cleveland Commission on Higher Education School-College Partnership Committee. Basic institutional information was requested, through Provosts and Deans, about the nature and scope of collaborative projects undertaken with the Cleveland Public Schools. Follow-up phone calls were made

to encourage cooperation and request additional information when appropriate.

Preliminary program descriptions were completed by the investigators and were presented at both Fall and Spring School-College Precollegiate Symposia sponsored by the Cleveland Commission. At those meetings participants were asked to critique the descriptions and the accuracy of preliminary analyses. The final cycle of what Guba (1978) describes as the "wave" consisted of sending final collaborative program protocols back to home institutions for validation.

After the surveys were collected, data abstracted, and program categories developed, it became apparent that a more detailed analysis would be helpful. A two-dimensional framework for classifying organizations (Perrow, 1969) guided the development of a Cleveland Public Schools Collaborative Program Matrix (See Figure 1). The matrix was organized around two major indices: Program areas (arts, academics, etc.) and grade level (elementary, secondary, etc.). Within these broad categories discrete subcategories were developed so that each program could be uniquely identified in the matrix.

FINDINGS

An analysis of the collaborative program survey and matrix revealed several major trends which seemed to characterize school-college partnerships in greater Cleveland.

Figure 1

Cleveland Public Schools
Collaborative Program Matrix

Program Areas	Levels						
	Preschool	Elementary	Middle	Secondary	Post-Secondary	K-12	Total
Pre-collegiate Academic			3	7			10
Student Development			1	12	3	1	17
Academically Accomplished Student		1		5			6
Faculty/Staff Development		3	2	5	1	17	28
Curriculum Development				2		3	5
Arts			3	2		6	11
Careers				9	1		10
Vocational Education				1	3		4
Health Related	1	4		2		2	9
Recruitment to Post-Secondary				2			2
Research on Teaching & Learning				2		1	3
Total	1	8	9	49	8	30	105

These results may also reveal the nature of school-college collaboration not only in Cleveland but perhaps in other large urban districts as well.

Overall, the survey identified 105 school-college partnerships which were operating in the Cleveland School district involving 17 colleges and universities during the 1987-88 school year. These figures alone were surprising to many in the community, the schools and higher education, and provided impetus for future activities. Major areas of program concentration included staff development, student development, and the arts. The programs ranged in scope from district-wide efforts to those involving only a few select students.

A significant trend revealed by the matrix was that the majority of student development, academic precollegiate programs (those developing academic preparation for college), and career programs were concentrated at the upper-secondary level. The frequency of precollegiate programming dramatically decreased at the middle and elementary school level. Similarly, many of the program opportunities targeted the academically accomplished, college-bound student. Few programs specifically targeted the typical, average urban school student. One could assume that the academically accomplished students with college aspirations would seem the most likely group to achieve access and success in post-secondary education. Yet the majority of students in the

urban school environment who are academically underprepared receive little assistance from the school-college programs. As Powell, Farrar and Cohen (1985) have suggested, these large numbers of "unspecial" students become the losers in the educational marketplace.

In addition, the study revealed large populations of "at risk" students were underserved or entirely neglected by school-college partnerships. While research continues to accumulate suggesting a profile of the potential school drop-out which is identifiable in elementary school (Comer, 1988), few programs to prevent or intervene in this pattern of school failure were identified.

Furthermore, virtually no program coordination between elementary, junior and senior high schools was identified. Thus, it appeared as Hodgkinson (1985) suggested, that collaborative programs within each of these educational levels function essentially as discrete systems with no overlap or follow-through across the total educational enterprise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of the survey and matrix, several recommendations were provided to the Precollegiate Symposia participants as possible strategies for action. First, future collaborative programming should be expanded to reach a broader segment of the student population. While precollegiate programming targeting the academically accomplished college-bound student is desirable and

worthwhile, it should not become the sole focus. As our data show, programs with this emphasis impact only a small percentage of the students in the entire district. Collaborative programming needs to be expanded to include the largely underserved populations such as the average, marginal or moderately underprepared student, the "at risk" student, and the unmotivated, underachieving student. These populations comprise a significant percentage of urban school students.

Second, strategies should be developed which will achieve a better balance of program representation across the curriculum and across grade levels (i.e. elementary, junior high, high school). Developing student potential, academic preparation and college aspirations must begin earlier than the junior-senior year. Many of the existing programs could potentially be redesigned to provide a logical downward extension which impacts the middle and elementary school levels. This would increase the probability that precollegiate preparation will be maximally effective.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, schools and colleges should work together to develop the necessary linkages between elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary institutions. These various levels can not operate effectively as discrete institutions that Hodgkinson (1985) describes. This requires the establishment of better articulation arrangements which form a comprehensive educational network, referred to by Boyer

The descriptive study enabled an objective analysis of the nature and needs of ongoing collaborative efforts with the Cleveland Public Schools. Several critical issues were raised through the analysis which became major topics of discussion during the following Cleveland Commission on Higher Education school partnership biennial symposia. Data from the study provided an opportunity during the school partnership meetings for school and higher education personnel to critique existing programs and, more importantly, plan future programs that address a broad spectrum of students in the Cleveland Public Schools. As a result of this awareness and the ongoing planning process a variety of new school/higher education activities have been established. These include university visitation programs, workshops for teachers and counselors regarding prerequisites for college enrollment and financial aid, summer camps where Cleveland Public School students participate in intensive summer programs based at college and university campuses.

As a consequence of these overall efforts, there has been less competition and more cooperation among higher education personnel involved with Cleveland Public Schools related projects. Furthermore, these data, coupled with the ongoing Cleveland Commission meetings, have enabled school and higher education personnel to discuss the underserved student needs and make a renewed commitment to develop programs for them.

An unintended consequence has been the mobilization of efforts to develop extensive collaborative projects across higher education institutions. Some of these inter-institutional activities are based upon simple tacit agreements in which personnel from institutions agree to work together to support and not to compete. Others, for example a university and a community college, have developed rather explicit collaborative agreements signed by their presidents which outline a course of activities to cooperatively support educational programs for students from the Cleveland Public Schools.

Finally, this descriptive study was originally developed for use by school and university personnel. We were absolutely surprised by the wide community interest in this project. Civic leaders, particularly government leaders, business leaders, and religious leaders have requested copies of the study. This descriptive information was compiled into a school-college partnership directory and distributed to school, university, community, and state representatives. This has provided a valuable base for the community to develop a better understanding of collaborative activities in the schools and has provided opportunities for dialogue to extend from school and higher education personnel to community and civic leaders.

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